

**REMARKS**

Claims 44-68 and 70-121 are pending.

Applicants note with appreciation the allowance of claims 71-115 and 121, and the indication that claims 46-50, 55-59 and 64-68 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. As detailed below, Applicants submit that all pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Claims 44, 45, 51-54, 60-63, 69, 70 and 116-120 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) over Pierrat et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,961,186). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Pierrat et al. does not qualify as a reference against this application. Pierrat et al. has a U.S. filing date of September 26, 2003. As explained in Applicants' previous response, because this application is a U.S. National Stage of PCT/JP03/010665, this application has an effective U.S. filing date that corresponds to the August 22, 2003 international filing date of the PCT application. Because August 22, 2003 is before the September 26, 2003 U.S. filing date of Pierrat et al., Pierrat et al. does not qualify as a reference against this application under any section of 35 U.S.C. §102. Withdrawal of the rejection is requested.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe anything further would be desirable to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicants' undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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